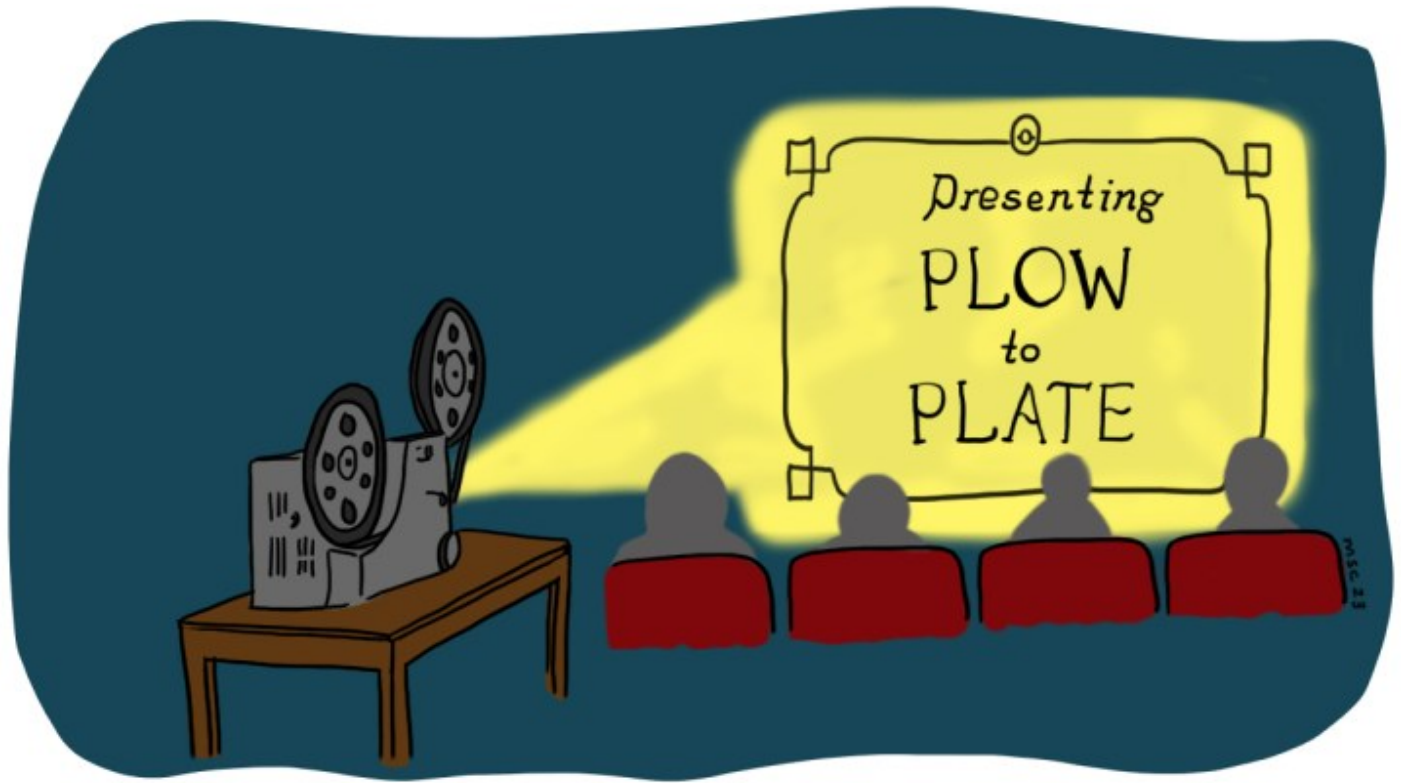


PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: NITROGEN 2000: THE DUTCH FARMERS' STRUGGLE

March 19, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

Most Coop shoppers are educated enough consumers to know that industrial farming is a major producer of gasses that contribute to climate change. Indeed, this connection has been a theme of many of the documentaries we have screened over the years. The solution proffered by these films has usually been the halcyon vision of an alternative system grounded in local, organic, sustainable and small-scale agriculture. But *Nitrogen 2000* goes deeper and explores a specific solution pursued by many in the the Netherlands. What the film shows is that policy solutions can engender their own sets of conflicts, costs and benefits and winners and losers.

Surprising facts: About 60,000 Dutch cattle farmers own 70% of the land in Holland, some of which can be found immediately outside of the major cities like Amsterdam or Rotterdam. Farms have been in families for generations and many Dutch have friends or relatives who are farmers. The country is known for its cheese and milk pro-

duction which forms part of its national identity. But Holland is also part of the European Union, and the nation has made promises, as did other EU members, to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. To keep its promises and climate mandates, the government pledged in 2019 to purchase 50% of the farms, cut the number of animals living on them in half and restore the farms' nature. To facilitate these actions, the government set up a 25 billion Euro fund to compensate the farmers and help them transition to other fields.

Compensation, however, has not allayed all the related concerns. Many fear the consequences will be abject poverty, a destroyed middle class, growing societal inequality, less opportunity for the next generation and higher food costs. Opponents view this as government overreach, anti-cow propaganda, and a blatant land grab to build houses, highways and factories. Some farmers agreed to give up their cows to keep their land but were told they still had to sell. At least six have hanged themselves in protest. As many political commentators, politicians and even scientists, echoed these concerns, farmers blocked bridges and highways with long convoys of tractors in mass protest and civil disobedience.

HOW BIG A PROBLEM IS NITROGEN REALLY? CAN OTHER TECHNIQUES TO LESSEN THE IMPACT OF AMMONIA (THROUGH COW PEE, POOP AND BURPS) BE EMPLOYED WHICH WOULD BE FAIRER SUCH AS COW TOILETS, MASKS AND CHANGES IN THEIR DIET?

Nitrogen 2000 presents views from both the farmers and their supporters, and those who advocate for the nitrogen plans. The film uses black and white newsreel clips equating the Soviet land collectivization between 1928 and 1940 and Holland's current nationalization plans. It's no mystery where the film's sympathies lie. The audience will likely also take the side of the hard-working farmers whose livelihoods are at risk and who had little direct say in these decisions.

Some of the questions, to which I do not have the answers, but am glad were raised are: How big a problem is nitrogen really? Can other techniques to lessen the impact of ammonia (through cow pee, poop and burps) be employed which would be fairer such as cow toilets, masks and changes in their diet? Or are the scientific studies upon which these major policy decisions are based valid? The viewer may also come to better understand why some believe that international alliances and climate treaties compromise national and individual sovereignty.

Nitrogen 2000 inverts some of the common tropes we have come to expect from the *Plow to Plate* film series. We expect to hear from filmmakers that Monsanto is evil. It is completely surprising, and a little bit alarming, to learn that many Dutch farmers and other commentators believe the environmentalists, a Dutch government pursuing green environmental policies, and the non-government organizations (NGOs) who will take over the relinquished farmlands are the villains.

This film, like our last two films, *From Food to Freedom* and *Plant Pure Nation*, emphasizes a populist impulse to control our own destinies free from strictures or distortions. *Nitrogen 2000* sometimes feels like it leans too heavily against the views and opinions of environmentalists. But it also challenges viewers to debate and question assumptions and beliefs that many films take for granted. It is easy to agree with the critiques of large-scale commercial agricultural interests and to take the side of the small-scale farmer. But what if that small-scale farmer is pitted against the Green Party or Green Peace?

Nitrogen 2000, April 9, 2024 @ 7:00 p.m.

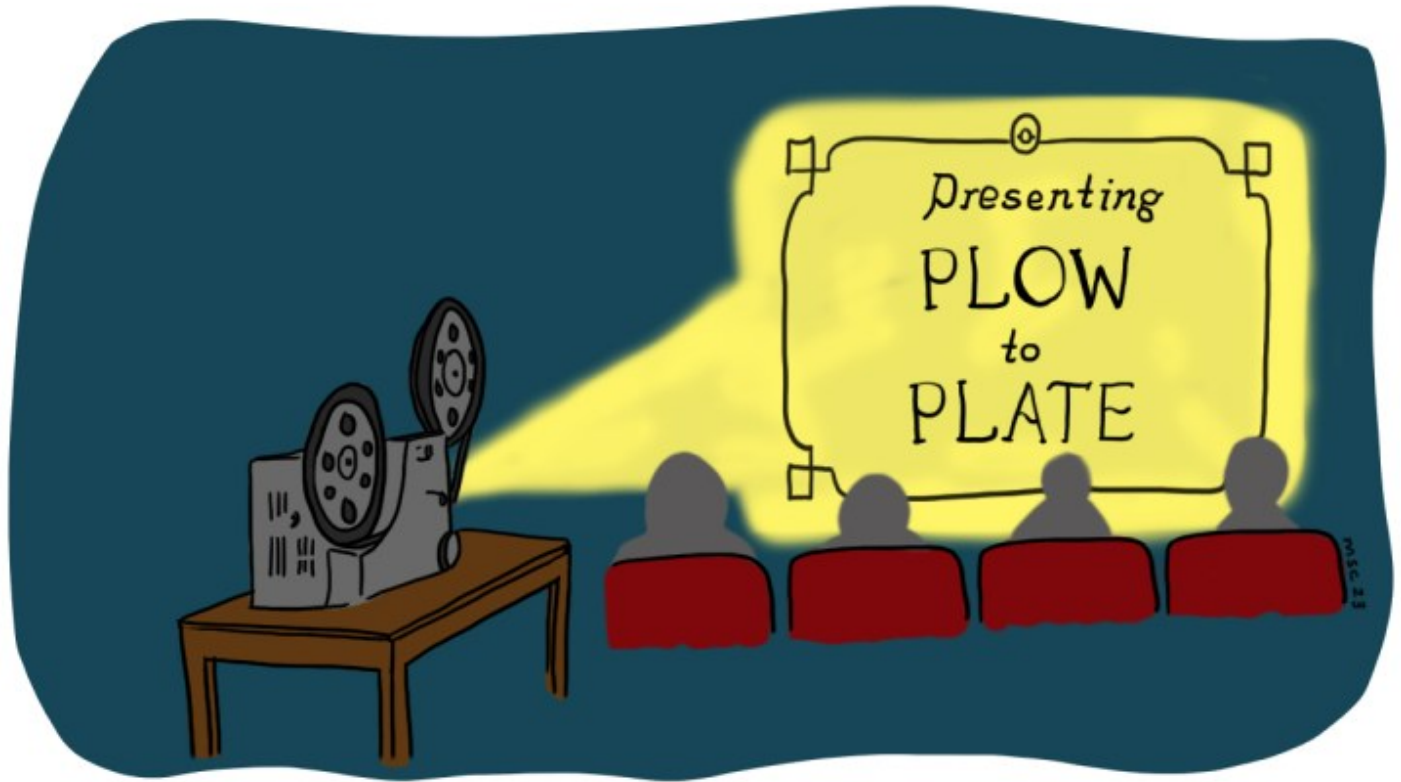
Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@mail.com.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife Dina and child Ana.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: PLANT PURE NATION

March 19, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

Plant Pure Nation (2015) serves as a companion film to February's feature, *From Food to Freedom* (2023). Writer and director Nelson Campbell is on the same mission—attempting to be the Johnny Apple Seed of the modern whole-food plant-based nutrition movement, along with his famous father, Dr. T. Colin Campbell.

Both films take a rigorous scientific approach to proving the benefits of the vegan diet. In last month's film, a crew of type 2 diabetics dined for ten days on a strictly controlled diet while living under the same roof. In this film, a series of similarly structured jump-starts were conducted, but the participants picked up their meals from a central location to take back to their homes. In theory, this may have allowed for more cheating, but pre- and post-medical testing showed that even under these less strict conditions, people lost weight, lowered their cholesterol and reduced their medi-

cations.

Despite these similarities, the films are complementary rather than redundant. *Plant Pure Nation* focuses much less on the human drama of those taking part in these jump-starts but rather grounds itself in the political drama of simply trying to spread the good news and healthy benefits of plant-based eating, in barbecue-loving states like Iowa, Kentucky and North Carolina (sometimes referred to as the stroke belt), where agricultural interests hold a lot of power. Nelson Campbell's evangelism is often met with the question, "Why haven't I heard this before?" *Plant Pure Nation* attempts to provide that answer.

The answer, as Nelson discovers, is in political interests and pushback. This should not have surprised him, as his family has been experiencing this for decades. The film goes back fifty years to a 1977 McGovern Committee report that highlighted Dr. T. Colin Campbell's research into the relationship between disease and diet. Back then the meat, egg and sugar industries, along with the Salt Institute, actively undermined the nutrition committee's goals, portraying Dr. Campbell and his supporters as "puritanical do-gooders."

In reaction to this, Dr. Campbell published his now-famous bestseller, *The China Study*, to get the word out to the masses directly since he was being stymied at the top. His son's films are drawn from the same populist model of direct engagement. But Nelson, like his father, first attempted to work within the political system.

THE FILM GOES BACK TO A 1977 MCGOVERN COMMITTEE REPORT THAT HIGHLIGHTED DR. T. COLIN CAMPBELL'S RESEARCH INTO DISEASE AND DIET.

At the request of state Representative Tom Riner, a Democratic member of the Kentucky House of Representatives, Nelson tried to craft House Bill 550, which would have funded a demonstration project on the benefits of a plant-based diet. At first,

the bill had strong support, but the reality of politics set in behind closed doors, as agricultural lobbyists, the Kentucky Farm Bureau and other special interests undermined it. However, just as the powers that be could not silence his father, Nelson decided to conduct his pilot project anyway, starting in rural Mebane, North Carolina.

It was around this time that Nelson came up with the name, Plant Pure, which to him denoted nature, clarity and cleanliness. As he assembled his group of sixteen from a cross section of the community—a politician, a business executive, a journalist, and two local cattle farmers (a husband and wife)—the themes and talking points came into clarity. This experiment was not only about eating better, but about taking control away from the hands of industry and government. It was about independence, freedom and liberty. It involved bottom-up control, not top-down authoritarianism.

These five consecutive jump-starts, each a bit larger and more complex than the previous, eventually led Nelson back to Kentucky, where he and Tom Riner hoped to insert a finding of fact about plant-based nutrition into the record. Yet even this modest proposal forms the basis of a nail-biting political drama. While some legislators are clearly in favor, others are more skeptical. One asks if the word “meat” can be appended to the list of good foods which include vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes and nuts. Dr. T. Colin Campbell had been asked not to come; and Nelson has been relegated to the balcony.

Following the vote, you can see why Nelson Campbell, like his dad, is taking the message directly to the people. The rally for the *Plant Pure Nation* is underway.

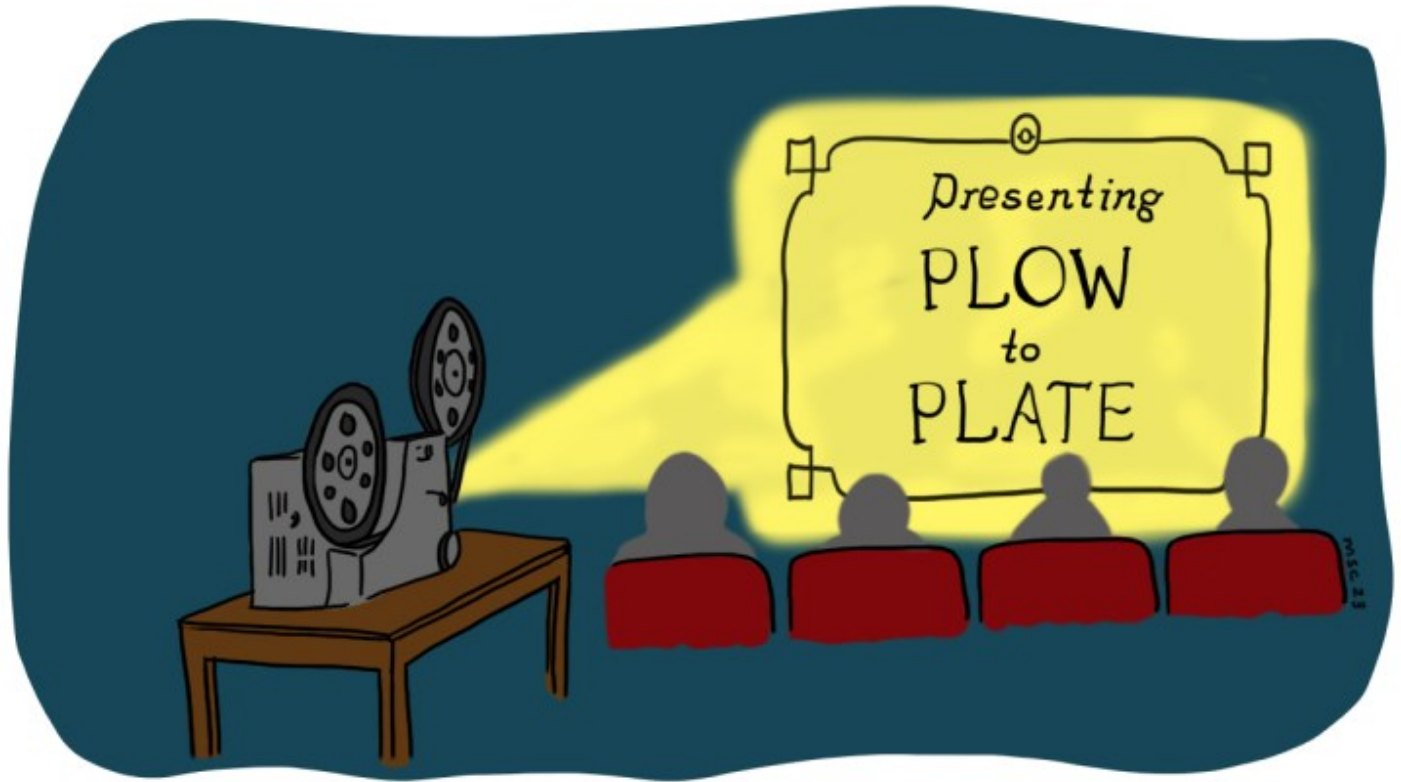
Plant Pure Nation, March 12, 2024 at 7 p.m.

Screening link

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@mail.com.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: FROM FOOD TO FREEDOM

March 19, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

From Food to Freedom is written and directed by Nelson Campbell, son of Dr. T. Colin Campbell, father of the whole-food plant-based nutrition movement who conducted pioneering research on the links between animal protein and cancer. Forming the basis of his 2005 book *The China Study*, which he co-authored with his son, Dr. Campbell's research found that animal foods increase serum cholesterol, heart disease, and cancer rates. The meat industry and other powerful interests labeled him a maverick and a quack, hoping to discredit and silence him. The filmmaker believes this is still the case. In granting us permission to screen the film, he wrote, "I don't know if you are aware of this, but Facebook is censoring our film promotion. Facebook's largest source of ad revenue comes from the pharma industry, so their policy toward us is not surprising given their heavy-handed control of the information they allow on their platform."

“FACEBOOK IS CENSORING OUR FILM PROMOTION. FACEBOOK’S LARGEST SOURCE OF AD REVENUE COMES FROM THE PHARMA INDUSTRY, SO THEIR POLICY TOWARD US IS NOT SURPRISING...”

NELSON CAMPBELL, DIRECTOR

From Food to Freedom is a highly entertaining but very serious, documentary that translates all the hard science and statistics into real-life stories. In this kind of vegan version of *The Real World*, Campbell recruits six individuals with type 2 diabetes (and their spouses) to spend ten days in a house in Greensboro, North Carolina, where every meal is plant-based. All participants are monitored and counseled, one-on-one and in group sessions, by a licensed physician. Their blood is sampled and scored at the beginning and end, while their glucose is continuously monitored throughout—an inverted version of *Supersize Me*, in which a month-long diet of nothing but McDonalds nearly killed filmmaker Morgan Spurlock.

The volunteers are not cherry-picked. They range from 18 to retirement age, and are not healthy. In addition to diabetes, many are overweight, have high cholesterol, triglycerides and blood pressure, suffer from sleep apnea, have trouble with mobility and are on multiple medications. Someone drove four hours to the house from out of state only to discover she had a broken arm. All are eager and positive, but none feel it will be easy. One is fond of telling his wife, “Rome was not built in a day...”

And yet, positive results are almost immediate. In group discussions, they enthusiastically describe how they feel better, have more energy, and appreciate the food—salads and vegetable-based versions of meatloaf, lasagna, macaroni and cheese and other familiar comfort foods. They are not just passive eaters but are welcomed into the kitchen to assist Campbell’s wife, Kim, a cookbook writer, and another chef, Fernando Peralto, with meal preparation.

At the end of the 10 days the eight individuals have collectively lost fifty-four pounds, good and bad cholesterol levels have universally dropped, blood pressures have improved and many have completely stopped or severely restricted their use of insulin and other medications.

Of course, the real question is, can this awesome accomplishment achieved in a communal and supportive setting, translate into real, long-term change? *From Food to Freedom* does not shirk this vital inquiry. While six months later, people occasionally fell off the wagon for a Burger King onion ring or restaurant meal, most climbed right back on. Successful participants were supported by a spouse or benefited from friends and housemates.

Those who struggled were more isolated. One was hampered by her “meat and potatoes” husband who refused to eat much of what she cooked. Another lived alone and succumbed too often to her cravings for potato chips and soda. But she was still on the journey and trying.

From Food to Freedom alludes to the still-powerful forces in society that control the terms of the debate, for example the pharmaceutical industry with its highly effective marketing, public relations and advertising. The film, made during COVID, shows that most people who died from the virus had underlying pre-existing conditions and yet none of the advice offered by the experts—wear a mask, wash your hands, social distance—included a healthy plant-based diet.

Though the Campbells are not naïve they remain convinced that the truth will prevail. The movement in which they have played such an important part is growing by the day. Twenty years ago it was hard to find soy milk yet today there are supermarket sections dedicated to plant-based alternatives. *From Food to Freedom* and other similar films have companion websites, full of useful information as well as affiliated non-profit organizations promoting the cause of alternative food systems. In this, the Park Slope Food Coop and the Plow to Plate Food movie series play a small but important and proud part.

From Food to Freedom, February 13, 2024 @ 7:00 p.m.

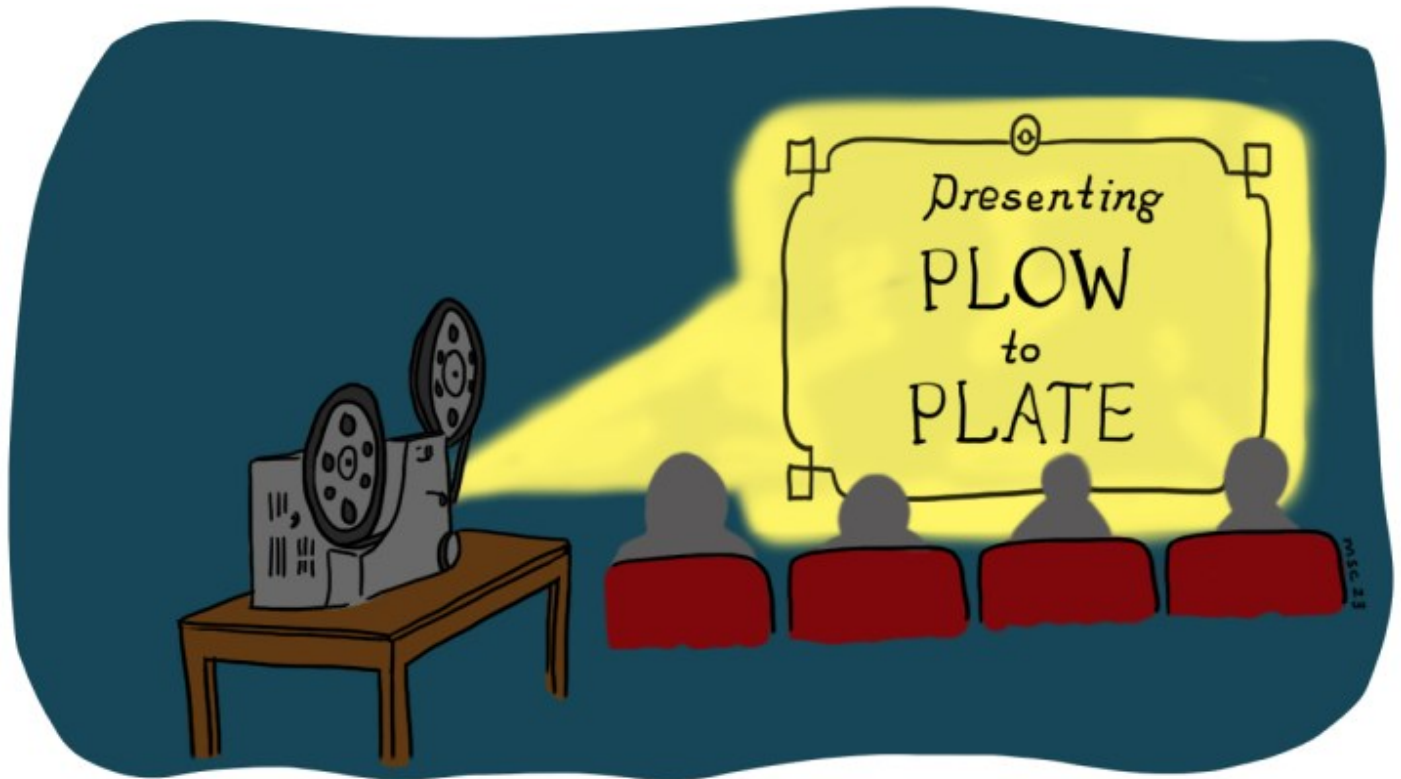
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Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife Dina and two children, Elan and Ana.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: KISS THE GROUND

March 19, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

Kiss the Ground begins with an unnamed narrator grimly intoning about fires, hurricanes and other natural disasters caused by climate change, as news reel footage graphically illustrates these catastrophes.

With six mass extinction events already underway, the bad news about our planet is overwhelming, and the fear that we're headed for a cliff puts most of us in a state of paralysis.

After this proclamation, the camera alights on the narrator, who is speaking into a microphone in a darkened studio. "The truth is, I've given up..." the man says while grimly biting his lower lip, "...and, the odds are, so have you." Then the camera then cuts to a picturesque forest, with a coastline in the background. "But what if there was another path?" the voice asks. This is Woody Harrelson, and his message is anything but cheery.

This other path, the subject of *Kiss the Ground*, is restoring healthy soil that has the ability to sequester vast amounts of greenhouse gases that could balance the climate, replenish fresh water supplies and feed the world.

THE MODEL GISELE BÜNDCHEN AND HER FORMER HUSBAND, THE FOOTBALL STAR TOM BRADY, DISCUSS THEIR HEALTHFUL EATING HABITS.

Kiss the Ground focuses on several key strategies of sequestration, the primary one being regenerative agriculture. Regenerative agriculture focuses on improving the health of soil, which has been degraded by the use of heavy machinery, fertilizers, and pesticides in intensive farming. Ray Archuleta, who works for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), is a proponent of regenerative agriculture. He travels the country teaching ranchers, farmers and other producers the basic scientific principles of soil.

Most of his students have been practicing industrial-scale agriculture for years but do not know how soil works. As Ray makes efforts to reduce chemical spraying and tilling, which harm the soil and contribute to erosion, he discovers that educational and social issues precede ecological issues.

Just as Ray seeks to persuade farmers that they can still farm productively and profitably without pesticides and herbicides and using no-till drilling, *Kiss the Ground* challenges other common misconceptions about modern-day agriculture, such as the belief that methane-burping cows are always bad for the environment.

In another segment, the actor Ian Somerhalder visits Allan Savory, the Zimbabwean ecologist and livestock farmer who originated Holistic Management—a system of restoring parched African savannah to fertile and healthy grasslands through a controlled system of cattle grazing. Doniga Markegard, a rancher who uses the innovative, carbon-storing methods of regenerative ranching in the depleted San Francisco Bay Area, has also achieved soil preservation through similar methods.

But it is not just producers who can improve the soil—everyday consumers can contribute by carefully choosing what they eat. For example, a vegan or vegetarian has a smaller environmental footprint than a meat eater. However, even carnivores can lessen their impact by choosing local, grass-fed animals rather than those mass produced on feedlots. These points are highlighted by the model Gisele Bündchen and her former husband, the football star Tom Brady, who discuss their healthful eating habits.

Cities can get into the action as well. For example, San Francisco has an innovative composting program that could serve as a national and international model. The system penalizes restaurants and citizens for contributing to the waste stream and rewards them for diverting food waste into compost, which is then given to local farmers.

One of the biggest successes highlighted by *Kiss the Ground* was the restoration of

China's 140,000 square mile Loess Plateau between 1994 and 2009. In this span, a team of scientists worked with communities to turn a dusty and dry landscape into a verdant one that supports agriculture and has lifted 100 million people out of poverty. The plateau had been completely devastated, but through a lot of cooperation and hard work, both its biodiversity and economy were restored.

PERHAPS THE MOST DIRE AND DEPRESSING STATISTIC CITED IN THE FILM IS THE UNITED NATIONS' DOOMSDAY ESTIMATE THAT THE WORLD'S REMAINING TOPSOIL WILL BE GONE WITHIN 60 YEARS.

Counterbalancing these positive narratives, the film cites some hard facts that harken back to those early, scary images of destruction. For example, we've lost one third of the world's topsoil since the 1970s, and two-thirds of the world is currently in the process of desertification, which is causing 40 million people to be pushed off their land every year.

One estimate suggests that there will be one billion soil desertification refugees by 2050. Perhaps the most dire and depressing statistic cited in the film is the United Nations' doomsday estimate that the world's remaining topsoil will be gone within 60 years. That is only 60 harvests left.

While *Kiss the Ground* bounces between fatalism and optimism, with an upbeat soundtrack by singer-songwriter and guitarist Jason Mraz, it seems to ultimately take the side of hope. After all, between the two potential paths facing our small green planet, what choice, really, do we have?

Kiss the Ground screened on October 10, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@mail.com.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: STORM LAKE

March 19, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

The principal character of *Storm Lake*, Art Cullen, is the editor of the *Storm Lake Times*, a small-town newspaper in Iowa with a staff of ten, mostly family, and a circulation of around 3,000 readers. With his shaggy mustache and mop-top hair, he is a character, most likely intentionally casting himself as a latter-day Samuel Clemens. Cullen takes his editor's beat very seriously; he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in journalism in 2017 for investigative articles challenging powerful corporate agricultural interests in the state. But he's also a folksy storyteller, in the vein of Garrison Keillor narrating the lives of those who inhabit his fictional Lake Wobegon.

The stories that Cullen tells—assisted by his wife, brother, son, sister-in-law and other relatives—are both broad and deep. Hyper-local news is covered: City Council meetings; the School Board of Supervisors; the Court House; the plight of local farmers con-

fronting odd weather and climate change; and who in the community had a baby, got married or died. But Cullen also covers nationally-oriented stories such as the 2020 presidential election; the disastrous Democratic Iowa Caucus meltdown; and the onset of COVID 19 that same year, with its impact on the paper and the town.

These stories are woven into the documentary, which also chronicles the struggles of the newspaper to stay afloat in the face of various financial challenges—competitors like Facebook, and the dearth of local businesses that can afford to buy advertisements. Cullen recognizes that he needs to increase his readership, but acknowledges as well that people now want to get news for free.

STORM LAKE

A NEWSPAPER. A FAMILY. A COMMUNITY.

DIRECTED BY
JERRY RISIUS AND BETH LEVISON

Another Spectacular 4th of July

[illegible]

stermlab.com



In the past fifteen years, as many as a quarter of the newspapers in the United States have shuttered. *Storm Lake Times* is one of the last of its kind, with its two--times-per-week circulation and \$1 per issue price. Founded in 1990, the paper often just breaks even, perhaps making a small profit one year, followed by a small loss the next. To survive, it must supplement advertising fees with support from its community of readers, which, with an influx of diverse immigrants, has become more diverse and Democratic over the years, though the population outside of town remains firmly Republican. For Cullen and his family, keeping the *Storm Lake Times* afloat is not primarily about achieving financial success. It is about providing good local journalism and news, which Cullen believes is the foundation of a successful democracy. Cullen feels that the 10,000 residents who form the community of Storm Lake represent a microcosm of the nation—which is only as strong as its newspaper and banks.

With the demise of many papers, such as Ohio's *Youngstown Vindicator* among others, Cullen estimates that there are around 300 "news deserts": medium-size towns of twenty to thirty thousand people without a local news source. The plight of these papers parallels that of small family farms, which are also endangered by economic forces and policies favoring agglomeration and huge corporate operations. The business models that once supported small farms, small papers and mom and pop stores have fallen apart, leaving rural communities weaker.

Storm Lake resembles a microcosm of parts of the United States as it grapples with common and widespread issues: warmer and wetter weather and its effect on crop yields and planting patterns, the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment, worsening political polarization, the plight of small family farms, and others. There are no easy answers to these problems. For example, if you repress large-scale agricultural production, where does that leave the workers who rely on it for employment?

Ultimately, this film's central theme is the role that a small-town newspaper plays in helping to shore up democracy. Cullen, who likes to quote Madison and Jefferson, and who proudly displays a poster of JFK on his office wall, may not be representative of his rural community. But in some ways his folksy Mark Twain demeanor and Midwest-

ern decency cast him as the quintessential American Everyman comfortably inhabiting a kind of mythic heartland made famous by *A Prairie Home Companion*, “where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.”

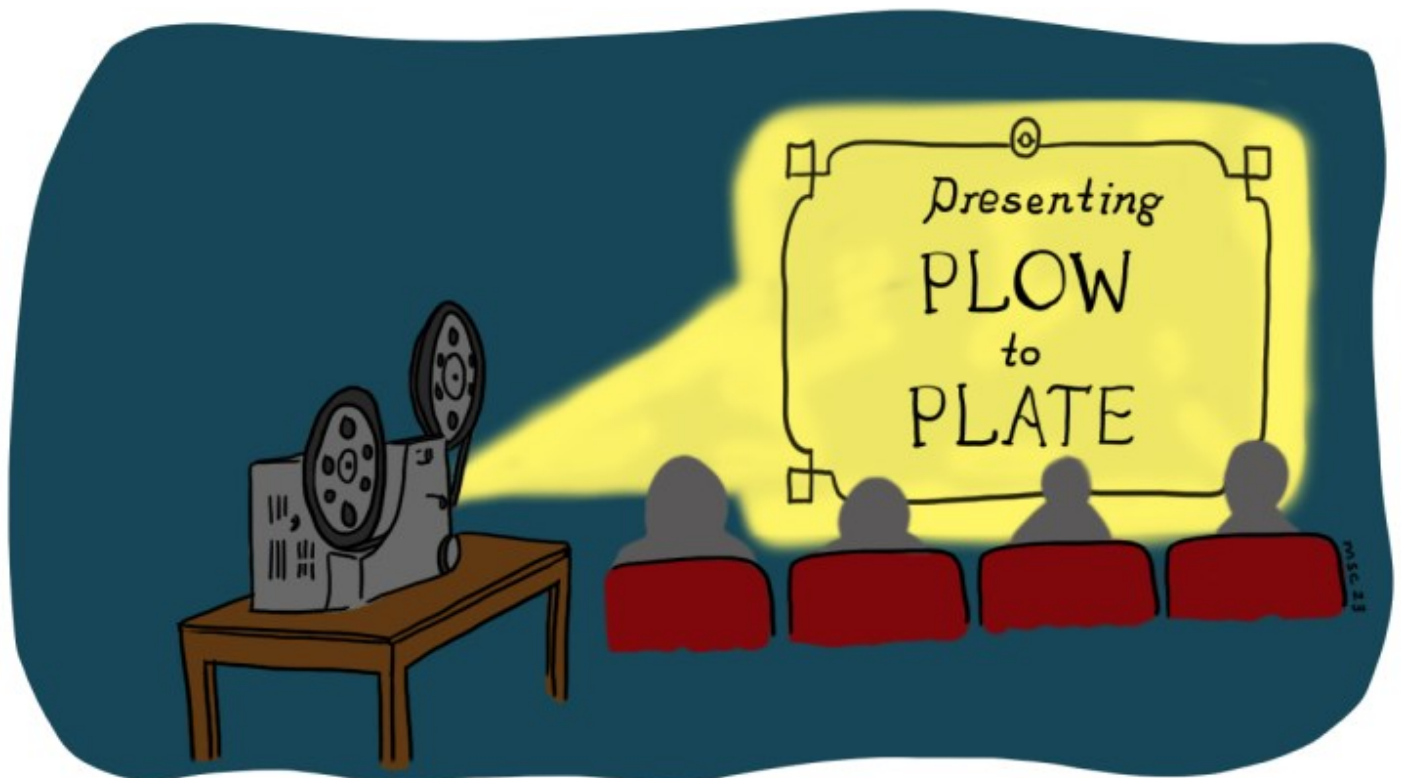
Storm Lake, Dec. 12, 2023 @ 7 p.m.

Screening link: <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@mail.com.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

March 19, 2024



Urban Farmers

By Adam Rabiner

It is relatively easy for those of us who live in the hustle and bustle of New York City to forget that only a little over a hundred years ago much of it was farmland. In 1900, a *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* article, “Haying in Brooklyn Borough,” describes a reporter who “began to leave civilization and saw farms fighting with brownstone lots to maintain their struggling dominance.” But scattered vestiges of that original period remain. For example, the 47-acre landmark Queens County Farm Museum—dating from 1697 and featured prominently in the 2017 documentary, *Urban Farmers*—is one of the longest continually farmed places in New York State. Composed almost entirely of young women farmers, the historic site educates the local community about regenerative agriculture through its fields and gardens, livestock, farm stand, composting program, apiary, monarch waystation and teaching gardens.

Another historical farm, built in 1810, is the 11-acre New York City landmarked Decker Farm located in Historic Richmond Town on Staten Island. Unlike its Queens counterpart, whose director spoke freely with the filmmakers about their mission and thoughts on urban agriculture, Decker refuses to allow filming or grant interviews. We do learn that Staten Island has the most open land of all five boroughs, but fewer Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) locations than its rival boroughs. Ironically, Decker Farm has allocated a single acre of land to an individual who uses it to supply a CSA located in Brooklyn.

Yet most of New York City’s urban farms are much more modest. Many are former vacant lots, dating back to the 1960s and 70s, that were claimed by their local communities and turned into community gardens. One example is East New York Farms! which has been working with youth, gardeners, farmers and entrepreneurs since 1998. *Urban Farmers* shows some of these young school kids, and their instructors, tending their plants, composting, discussing the importance of discovering where their food comes from, learning about food justice and food deserts and creating a viable market for their fruits and vegetables. The program does not necessarily aim to create urban farmers, but rather to teach leadership skills to youth that can be carried down

any future path its interns and volunteers embark on.

Urban Farmers is not an in-depth study of these three locations and what they have to offer. Rather, it uses the three different farms as a starting point for various discussions about the current food system. If you are not a member of a CSA, the spirited conversation about its benefits to both consumers and producers might just inspire you to join one. If you complement your Park Slope Food Coop shopping with occasional jaunts to a local farmers' market but are a bit shy interacting while you purchase okra, this film could prod you into asking a question or two. The farmers seem to love talking to curious customers.

Urban farming, even in a dense metropolis like New York City, is here to stay. Community gardens still have few legal protections but there are coalitions and even bills to preserve them in perpetuity, like the historic farms featured in the film. And as land becomes scarcer, rooftop farms, like Brooklyn Grange, not featured in the film, may represent the future. What *Urban Farmers* demonstrates is that in 2023, just as in 1900, no matter where you go in this vast megacity, you can land upon a place where you can smell the roses—and perhaps even some manure.

"Urban Farmers," November 14, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@mail.com.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and two children, Elan and Ana.